

# BIG MOUNTAIN FIRE DISTRICT (BMFD) BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MEETING MINUTES FEBRUARY 27, 2023

AND SPECIAL MEETING APRIL 3, 2023

CALL TO ORDER – 3:04pm Feb 27, 2023

ROLL CALL – Trustees Sue Oemichen, Tony Patterson, Tom Sato, Paul Silverman, Steve Cosby (via Zoom); Chief Ben DeVall; Firefighters Ken Wensel, Tommy Hodges, Colyn Bray, Colin Christopoulos (via Zoom)

PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES – A motion to approve Minutes of the December 12, 2022 Board meeting was made by Tom Sato and seconded by Tony Patterson. The motion was passed unanimously.

## FIRE CHIEF REPORT -

- Those District firefighters who need to renew their Emergency Medical Services (EMS) licenses have been working on doing so. Colin Christopoulos attended a refresher course, and Kevin Wise is scheduled to attend one in March.
- Chief Ben DeVall has not heard back from the local Montana Services Office regarding the District's audit extension request. Montana House Bill **HB262**, **spearheaded** by Representative Jerry Schillinger, would revise local government financial reporting and audit requirements. Chief has not reviewed the bill thoroughly, but from what he has seen, it would be helpful to many jurisdictions.
- BMFD has again applied for a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) for Self-Contained Breathing

Apparatus (SCBA). Chief still has not received a turndown letter from the previous cycle and may not hear until September. The Grant criteria changed slightly, so Chief was unable to submit the same application as in the prior year. Thus the Department may still get the Grant requested in 2021, and if so, the District would then pull the 2022 request, since duplicate funding cannot be received.

- A regional group again requested an AFG on behalf of 19 area departments for the purchase of mobile radios. The Grant total was \$1.6 million.
- Chief DeVall has been appointed to serve a three-year term on the Flathead County EMS Administrative Board.
- Chief has been in contact with BMFD's health insurance agent. Premiums will not increase when the policy is renewed April 1st. As usual, Chief asked if there was anything else available at a lower cost. The agent said nothing compares to what the District has now and the premium it pays, but she will further investigate the situation, if BMFD so desires. Most carriers had 7-8% premium increases this year.
- A community group met to discuss a possible secondary egress from Big Mountain. (See Old Business below.)
- The County Trauma Protocol has changed, and the Department will now be transporting more patients to Logan Health/Kalispell than has been the case in the past.
- The District ambulance had a cooling system problem which was fixed by Montana Truck Works.
- The BMFD Explorer had a brake issue which turned out to be a bad right hub and ball joint. While it was at the Les Schwab shop, the front brakes were also replaced.
- Chief met with Kevin Malloy from Carver Engineering to discuss continued real estate development east of The Glades.

- The District remains active with Firesafe Flathead, and it appears there is Federal funding coming for fuel mitigation work. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) have begun identifying projects, so when funds are available, work can begin. Chief DeVall let the group know BMFD plans to hold a community wildfire education session in March and was told DNRC and USFS officials would participate.
- Work on the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grant has begun and is due March 17th.
- BMFD firefighter Ken Wensel has been working on the District Newsletter.
- Big Mountain Firefighters Association (BMFA) has decided to raise funds for SCBA, in the event the AFG is not received, and also for an engine to replace 2081 and 2032. A BMFA letter requesting donations will be sent out shortly.
- Chief talked with Scott Countryman from Goosehead Insurance and answered questions about the District and Ptarmigan Village.
- Chief attended a Medical Documentation class put on by the County. It was a very informative session.
- A Union/BMFD Board of Trustees group met to discuss policy changes and a new contract. (See Trustee Report and Old Business below.)
- Chief has had two on-line meetings with Karen Hurley from Cordico regarding a firefighter wellness program for the District. Cordico is a subsidiary of Lexipol, which is currently used for BMFD on-line training. The wellness program looks good so far, and Chief will be following up with Hurley to get a few more questions answered. He will then share his findings with BMFD Trustees and firefighters.

- Colin Christopoulos has been working on homeowner database updates. The program seems to be working as envisioned as a result of recent changes made.
- There was a lull in firefighter training, but District Training Officer Kevin Wise is again making assignments and also is developing a goals statement.
- Oil in the District ambulance was changed.
- New equipment check sheets have been created for all BMFD apparatus. Staff will begin using them shortly when doing their rig checks.
- There was an after-action review for an EMS call the Department was dispatched to in Olney. The victim was a snowmobiler 20 miles away from a paved road. BMFD did not respond, since there was no way to get the patient to BMFD equipment. The incident likely should have been dispatched as a Search and Rescue. The Sheriff plans to clean up the run cards for similar future calls.
- The District finished 2022 with 193 dispatches.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

#### TREASURER'S REPORT –

The November and December 2022 and January 2023 Financial Reports were distributed to Board members under separate cover prior to the Board meeting. Year-to-Date (YTD) Fiscal Year (FY) should be at 58.33% based financials through January 2023.

Discussion of financial statement notes, statement of net assets, balance sheet, statement of activities, labor detail, and budget vs actual all were distributed to Trustees prior to meeting as noted.

FY23	November 2022	December 2022
Total assets (Ckg/Svgs) YTD	\$496,086.60	490,004.76
Total income YTD	\$328,167.38 (51.1%)	379,173.34 (59.0%)
Total expenses YTD	\$229,946.34 (32.6%)	\$284,953.17 (40.5%)
Net ordinary income YTD	\$98,221.04 (159.3%)	\$94,220.17 (152.9%)

FY23	January 2023
Total assets (Ckg/Svgs) YTD	\$459,678.28
Total income YTD	\$397,960.59 (61.9%)
Total expenses YTD	\$336,886.43 (47.8%)
Net ordinary income YTD	\$61,074.16 (99.1%)

A motion to approve the Treasurer's Report was made by Tony Patterson and seconded by Paul Silverman. The motion was passed unanimously.

#### TRUSTEE REPORT-

The District's Firewise status has been recertified. New Firewise Board members are Suzanne Burrough and Woody Hust. Two community wildfire education talks are being planned per year, one in the summer and another in the winter. The initial program will hopefully occur in mid-March at Kandahar or the Base Lodge. Flathead County Fire Service Area Manager Lincoln Chute, Tally Lake Ranger District Fuels Mitigation Officer Mike West, and DNRC Forestry Assistance and Fire Information Officer Ali Ulwelling have agreed to participate.

Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) negotiations between the Board and firefighters have continued. Union representatives proposed a 12% firefighter pay increase, but Board analysis dictated that a 9% raise retroactive to January 2023 is the maximum amount the District budget can currently absorb. Treasurer Steve Cosby presented a 5-Year forecast of District revenue, expenditures, and potential new hires. There are many future funding unknowns, both positive and negative, and they will have to be considered as they arise. Tony Patterson made a motion to adopt the 9% increase, and it was seconded by Tom Sato, with the caveat that the issue be revisited in three months. The motion was passed unanimously.

## OLD BUSINESS –

Tom Sato briefed Trustees on continuing development of the BMFD website.

A draft of the annual BMFD Newsletter is nearing completion. The Newsletter will be distributed in the same envelope as BMFA's donation letter.

A brainstorming meeting on a potential second Big Mountain egress was attended by Board members Sue Oemichen, Tony Patterson, and Paul Silverman; Lincoln Chute; Mike West; Dave Purdy of the Flathead County Road Department; Brett Oemichen of the Big Mountain Homeowners Association (HOA); and two other District residents. For several reasons, participants concluded that a second emergency egress is impractical at this time and that mitigation measures such as hazardous fuel removal are a more realistic approach to reducing fire and evacuation danger. Trustee Paul Silverman will be conferring with Flathead Electric Cooperative to discuss potential Co-Op actions such as power pole and wire modifications on lower Big Mountain Road, as well as vegetation removal.

After a review by Tony Patterson, Steve Cosby made a motion, seconded by Paul Silverman, to make minor policy changes involving firefighter leave of absence, uniform and protective clothing, and medical exams. The motion was passed unanimously.

The Annual General Insurance Review Report is being drafted by Chief DeVall and Tony Patterson. (See Fire Chief Report above.)

#### NEW BUSINESS –

Chief DeVall presented a status update on the Annual General Insurance Review, Wellness Program, and Mutual Aid Agreements. (See Fire Chief Report above.)

FIREFIGHTER COMMENT - Union rep Ken Wensel acknowledged that BMFD firefighter benefits are excellent, but he noted that wages are a more important factor for employees. Trustee Tony Patterson proposed that the Board investigate whether benefits might be reduced as an avenue to increase pay. An effort to reduce overtime should also be undertaken. Wensel stated that BMFD firefighters would like to receive wages equal to Whitefish Fire Department's. Sue Oemichen maintained that rural firefighter workload is not directly comparable to that of a municipal department. All agreed that the new resort tax currently in process will be critical to future District finances.

NEXT MEETINGS – April 24 and June 26, 2023, both at 3pm

ADJOURNMENT – A motion to adjourn was made by Sue Oemichen and seconded by Paul Silverman. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 5:46pm.

## SPECIAL MEETING APRIL 3, 2023

CALL TO ORDER – 2:04pm

ROLL CALL – Trustees Sue Oemichen, Tom Sato, Steve Cosby, Paul Silverman, Tony Patterson (via Zoom); Chief Ben DeVall; Firefighters Ken Wensel, Robert Sharp, Colin Christopoulos, Kevin Wise, Tommy Hodges

PUBLIC COMMENT – None

SOLE PURPOSE OF MEETING – Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

The following issues related to firefighter salaries were discussed:

- Consumer price index (CPI)
- Firefighter longevity
- Firefighter probation
- Wage increase criteria and amount of pending pay raise
- Pending Montana Senate Bill 511 and potential impact on BMFD funding
- Pending resort tax
- Pending SAFER Grant
- Possible BMFD emergency fund
- Montana law provision on Trustee liability for excess spending
- Potential Whitefish annexation of Big Mountain Fire District
- Performance-based metrics
- Communication with District community on BMFD services
- Possible videotaping of future Board meetings

A motion to reaffirm a 9% firefighter pay raise, retroactive to January 1, 2023, was made by Steve Cosby and seconded by Paul Silverman. The motion was passed unanimously, with the understanding that there also was an automatic 3% raise effective July 1, 2022, and a similar increase scheduled for July 1, 2023. In addition, a commitment was made by the Board to review Fiscal Year 2024 financials on or about July 1, 2023 to assess the possibility of further pay increases. Firefighters present concurred in the Board's actions, although not unanimously.



ADJOURNMENT – A motion to adjourn was made by Steve Cosby and seconded by Paul Silverman. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 4:14pm.